


HHS/ED COMM #2
October 10, 2013
Update

MEMORANDUM

October 8, 2013

TO: Health and Human Services Committee
Education Committee

FROM: Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst 

SUBJECT: Update -- "Healthy Choices, Happy Students," an obesity-prevention, school-based program

The Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education Committees will receive an update on the Healthy Choices, Happy Students obesity prevention program implemented by School Health Services in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). During Committee review of the FY14 Operating Budget for School Health Services, the HHS Committee Chair requested that an update on the program be scheduled outside of budget discussions.

The following individuals are expected to participate in the discussion:

- Uma Ahluwalia, Director, DHHS
- Ursula Hermann, Director, Department of Student Services, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)

Other DHHS representatives from Public Health Services and School Health Services are expected to attend the meeting, as are MCPS representatives from Health Education and Food Services.

Program Description and Service Information

The Department has received funding from the Mead Family Foundation to provide an obesity-prevention, school-based program called Healthy Choices, Happy Students. FY14 is the third year that the Department has received \$20,000 for the program, which is implemented by school community health nurses. The program is designed to: (1) increase physical activity; (2) help students make healthier food choices; and (3) form partnerships with MCPS and the federally-funded Food Supplement Nutrition Education program.

The following are highlights of the activities in the Healthy Choices, Happy Students program:

- ***Nutrition Nuggets:*** Afterschool program for grades 4, 5, and 6. Provides basic nutrition information through engaging activities that encourage students to read food labels, develop cooking skills, and make healthy food choices.

FY13: served 105 students at 7 schools with 50% or greater FARMS (Shriver ES, Rolling Terrace ES, Highland ES, Summit Hall ES, Gaithersburg ES, Parkland MS, and Loiederman MS).

FY14: Target start date is November 1, 2013. Sites are currently being recruited with a goal of seven sites.

- ***Student Strides Walking Club:*** Targeted for grades 3-5. Implemented during recess or before or after school. Students learn physical activity-based lessons, receive journals to track their progress, get a healthy snack, and receive other incentives to keep them moving.

FY13: served 175 students at 14 schools (Diamond ES, Crest Haven ES, Brooke Grove ES, Great Seneca Creek ES, Greenwood ES, Goshen ES, Thurgood Marshall ES, Clear Spring ES, Bradley Hills ES, Lake Seneca ES, Waters Landing ES, Highland ES, Kemp Mill ES, and Maryvale ES).

FY14: Target start date is November 1, 2013. Sites are currently being recruited with a goal of 15 sites.

- ***Nutrition Lunch Bunch:*** Serves 4th and 5th graders in groups that meet for six sessions during the lunch period. Encourages healthy diet and habits and includes an interactive activity and a related snack.

FY13: Served 110 students at 11 schools (East Silver Spring ES, Bell ES, Brooke Haven ES, Montgomery Knolls ES, Takoma Park ES, Stone Mill ES, Strawberry Knolls ES, Woodfield ES, Rolling Terrace ES, Georgian Forest ES, and Kemp Mill ES).

FY14: Target start date is November 1, 2013. Sites are currently being recruited with a goal of 10 sites.

Recruitment

The program is advertised to every student in the grades it is offered, and participation is voluntary program. DHHS explains that because of the universal invitation, individuals are not singled out and that no reports of stigma have been linked with program participation. Students are selected to participate based on high need, referral via lottery or on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Outcomes

Outcomes measurements are tracked through self-report journals and pre and post-surveys measuring increased physical activity and healthier food choices as well as provider observations relating to student behavior and participation. Pre and post surveys administered at the beginning and end of each program assess food consumption, preferences, food and exercise habit, engagement in exercise, mood before and after exercise, and screen time. The Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program through University of Maryland Extension, has provided some analysis of survey data.

DHHS has explained the pre and post testing surveys ask similar questions to the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey. Nutrition Nuggets asks about nutritional preferences and choices; Student Strides asks about physical activity; and Nutrition Lunch Bunch asks about both nutrition and activity (including TV/computer time).

DHHS reports the following results from surveys administered by DHHS in FY13.

- ***Nutrition Nuggets:***
 - Received an average of 9.3 hours of nutrition education.
 - Doubled the number of fruits eaten the day before the survey.
 - Increased preference for 6 fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods.
 - Increased their belief that they can prepare their favorite fruits and vegetables at home.
- ***Student Strides Walking and Fitness Club***
 - The student's endurance and speed of walking improved over the course of the 12 weeks curriculum.
 - The data from the log books supports that the students enjoyed walking and were pleased with their improved fitness, indicating an improvement in mood.
- ***Nutrition Lunch Bunch***
 - Improved their eating and exercise habits either by increasing daily consumption of fruits and vegetables or by time spent exercising each day.
 - Did not decrease screen time (computer or TV).

Additional anecdotal accounts from school community health nurses delivering the program also demonstrate program impact:

- Nurses report the programs to be very easy to implement and well received by the students and school Administrators.
- After the "Think your Drink" lesson about sugary soft drinks, the kids reported drinking more water and less soda. One of those was so thrilled because his acne has improved since he switched."

- “What I see happening in our walking/exercise group this year, is that some of the students with limited social skills are making friends with students with which they normally do not have interactions. Also; when we first began Walking Club this year, several students circled the “anxious” face on their papers at the beginning of the walk, and now, some are shouting out “I am happy!” It’s cool!”
- “I have had one girl lose 10 lbs since we started and she walks everyday now. She walks to school with her mother now instead of riding in the car.”
- “We discussed My Plate each week and compared our lunches to it. As the weeks went on, more and more students wanted their plate to fit the My Plate model.”

Council staff notes that the Healthy Choices, Happy Students program supplements efforts by MCPS and other providers to offer school-based opportunities for students to learn about and engage in healthy behaviors before, during, and after school.